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ABSTRACT

Children's literature, when used appropriately in conjunction with textbooks, can become a powerful teaching tool that builds relevant prior knowledge, capitalizes on the student's skill in reading narrative, engenders interest and motivation, and consequently promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the content in both trade books and textbooks. By their very nature, textbooks can provide only limited coverage of a topic, and teachers must identify concepts that can be further developed by having children read trade books. This approach to content area instruction requires the teacher to be familiar with a great variety of children's books. To make selection easier, teachers can use annotated subject guide indices to current children's books. After the books are selected and read by the teacher, they can be presented to the student and can be very effective if presented as a schema and interest builder before children read the text. Knowing which concepts and information will be met later in the textbooks, teachers reading stories orally can easily highlight key passages by reading them with particular emphasis. When stories are being read independently or in small groups, teachers can alert students to these passages prior to reading. Trade books are also effective as elaboration and extension of content and concept acquisition during and after reading the text. Finally, after reading trade books and textbooks, students should be engaged in activities that allow them to assess what they have learned, to interpret their knowledge in some way, and, thereby, to personalize it. (HOD)

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College Reading and Learning Assistance
Technical Report 86-03

Literature: The Key to Lively Content Courses

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Summary The content areas deal with interesting, vital information; but teachers who rely on textbooks as their sole teaching resource may render this information dry and lifeless. In this article we contend that skillful use of children's literature makes the content curriculum more palatable, comprehensible and memorable. We argue that the use of literature is likely to promote students' interest in and involvement with content material and thereby increase their learning. First, we present theoretical support for our thesis; then we offer a step-by-step plan for integrating literature into content areas.

CS 008 461

Literature: The Key to Lively Content Courses

Many students will receive their first serious look at different cultures, historical eras and events, politics and the scientific advances of the human race through content area textbooks. Due to the demands of limited space, adoption committees and stylistic precedent, however, textbook publishers often present a distilled version of content area information. Emphasis is upon important facts, broad views, pivotal characters and general effects on whole populations resulting, inevitably, in a detached tone and dry material. But it must not be forgotten that within each of these cultures, social movements, historical eras and scientific advances lies richly detailed stories about the people who made them or who watched them being made and were affected by them. The narrative element -- the stories that lie within all human interactions -- is precisely what publishers often omit from textbooks and, in so doing, rob them of all life.

One of the most instructive precedents for bringing content material to life is Selma Lagerlöf's book, The Wonderful Adventures of Nils, written for and adopted by the public schools of Sweden in 1907 and a rare example of textbook and storybook successfully written as one. In this adventure-filled story, Nils, a boy-turned-to-elf, sails back and forth across Sweden astride a barnyard goose as the author subtly acquaints the reader with an encyclopedia of knowledge about that country.

Lagerlöf recognized the value of story and exploited it fully by stringing dry, educational subjects on the thread of exciting adventures and the engaging character of Nils Holgersson.

In this article we contend that skillful use of children's literature makes the content curriculum more palatable, comprehensible and memorable. Moreover, use of literature is likely to promote students' interest in and involvement with content material and thereby increase their learning. First, we present theoretical support for our thesis; then we offer a step-by-step plan for integrating literature into content areas.

Supporting Theory

The contributions which children's literature can make to the teaching of subject matter are limited only by the sensibilities of the individual teacher, for the use of trade books with textbooks would appear to rest upon firm theoretical underpinnings. Developmental theorists in reading (Chall, 1982; Herber, 1978; Singer & Donlan, 1980) have pointed to a pivotal stage in the maturation of young readers that occurs when students first are introduced to content-type textbooks. Qualitative changes in reading ability must be made, say these theorists, if youngsters are to achieve success with this "new" text. Children up to this time have been learning to read stories. For many children, the transition to content texts leads to their first difficulties with reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). In response to these

difficulties, teachers typically emphasize skills training, an approach that has to be questioned in light of accumulating data which reveal that students in the middle and upper grades do not possess higher-order thinking skills necessary for deep and meaningful processing of textual material (Anderson, et al., 1985; NAEP, 1985). Benjamin Bloom, the noted educational researcher and learning theorist, is credited with saying that failure to learn, like success in learning, is cumulative. The implication of Bloom's statement for our discussion is that children's past successes with stories should be exploited by the content area teacher.

A better response to the difficulties students may experience as they begin to read textbooks would be for the teacher to continue to use stories along with texts. Anyone experienced in working with young readers knows that they can understand and appreciate quality fiction. And while there is little evidence on this point, stories, when used appropriately in conjunction with textbooks, can become a powerful teaching tool that builds relevant prior knowledge, capitalizes on the student's skill in reading narrative, engenders interest and motivation and, consequently, promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the content in both trade and textbook.

Affective model builders in reading (Athey, 1976; Mathewson, 1976) have shown that attitudinal factors have a direct influence on cognitive variables involved in the reading process and, significantly, are amenable to intervention treatment. Athey found, for example, that when children find reading pleasurable

and interesting, their positive attitudes toward reading rapidly become generalized to most other subjects and should lead to a deeper love of reading as a primary source of information and enjoyment. Children's reading comprehension has been shown to be greater with high-interest materials, because interesting material better maintains their attention and is motivating (Asher & Markell, 1974; Daniels, 1971). Green (1984) determined that when given a choice, children prefer the rich writing styles of literature to basal texts. Huck (1977) has said that "...children know the difference between those books which sustain and excite their imaginations by telling real stories and those basic texts designed for instruction in reading" (p. 363). She maintains that children are motivated to read and learn from imaginative literature (1982).

While children's literature can be a powerful motivator for reading, combining its use with content area textbooks is compelling also from a schema-building perspective. Schema theory posits that the more developed, well-defined knowledge structures a reader possesses about a particular topic, the greater the likelihood the reader will have successful experiences in dealing with new information related to that topic. The most important instructional implication of schema theory is for the teacher to build bridges between new information, the material from which the students are expected to learn, and students' prior knowledge (Anderson, 1984; Johnson & Pearson, 1978). Stories, written in familiar narrative style,

can provide background information and call to mind related ideas, building the foundation for easier assimilation of textual information. Thus, the storybook becomes the students' terra firma on their journey into the unchartered sea of exposition.

Using Children's Literature in Content Classrooms

Recently, authors have urged teachers to use literature in various content classrooms (Hennings, 1982; Radebaugh, 1981; Smardo, 1982). Although they offer excellent annotated bibliographies, these authors provide limited specific instructional methods for combining trade book and textbook. Furthermore, they do not attempt to construct a theoretical basis for such a union.

The intent in this section is to describe in detail methodological considerations for selecting and using trade books in content area classes. A sequence of steps will be discussed which should serve as a generic plan for all subject-area teachers preparing to use relevant children's literature along with textbook-based instruction.

Step One: Identify Salient Concepts By their very nature, textbooks can provide only limited coverage of a topic. While they are excellent dispensers of facts, they often lack explicit development of important concepts. In these cases teachers must identify concepts for further development. To illustrate, consider the following treatment of Hitler, the Nazis and the Jews in a 5th-grade history/social studies book.

> Hitler's followers were called Nazis. Hitler and the Nazis built up Germany's military power and started a campaign of terror against the Jews who lived in that country. Hitler claimed that the Jews were to blame for Germany's problems. He took away their rights and property. Many Jews left Germany and came to live in the United States. The Nazis began to arrest Jews who stayed in Germany and put them in special camps. Then the Nazis started murdering them. Before Hitler's years in power came to an end, six million Jews lost their lives (p.413).

To infer essential concepts from texts like this one (the paragraph above is the extent of text related to the holocaust in Houghton Mifflin's America: Past and Present, 1980), teachers should ask:

(1) What are the driving human forces behind the events?

(2) What phenomena described in the textbook have affected ordinary people (including me and my students) or may do so in the future?

(3) What universal patterns of behavior related to this reading should be explained?

Doubtless, this process of inquiry will help the teacher identify the most conspicuous of salient concepts -- prejudice -- only hinted at in the sweeping, factual account of Naziism and World

War II in the above example.

Step Two: Identify Appropriate Tradebooks to Help Teach Concepts

Obviously, this approach to content area instruction requires the teacher to be familiar with a great variety of children's books. To make selection easier, annotated subject guide indices to current children's books are available. In most cases, the selections in these guides are based upon quality, and reading levels are included. Some of the most helpful of these reference books are A to Zoo (a guide to picture books) (1982), The Elementary School Library Collection (1976, supplemented every 5 years), Children's Catalog (1981, supplemented annually), and The Best in Children's Books (Sutherland, 1980). Other sources which we have found particularly helpful in book selection are children's literature texts such as Cullinan's (1981) Literature and the Child and Huck's (1976) Children's Literature in the Elementary School and, of course, children's specialists in school or public libraries.

Regarding our topic of Jews in Europe during World War II, we find a wealth of related children's stories listed in the subject guide indices including Friedrich (Richter, 1970), Upon the Head of the Goat (Siegal, 1981), The Winter When Time Was Frozen (Pelgrom, 1980) and The Island on Bird Street (Orlev, 1984).

An obvious corollary to Step Two is that teachers read the books before using them in class. In Siegal's Upon the Head of the Goat the reader meets a 9-year-old Hungarian, Piri, and hears

her intimate chronicle of how Hitler's edicts changed and eventually destroyed her remarkably resilient family. In Friedrich, a German boy witnesses the gradual victimization of his Jewish playmate and friend by Nazi propaganda and pogrom during the years 1925 - 1942. Justin, the resourceful 10-year-old hero of The Island on Bird Street, is entirely believeable in his loneliness and fright but frequent bravado as he survives alone for over a year in an abandoned Jewish ghetto in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Pelgrom's story, The Winter When Time Was Frozen, tells of the Dutch girl Noortje and her life as an evacuee on the Everingen's farm in German-occupied Holland.

Teachers will note that these stories and others like them are, first of all, human. They will understand that the effects of distant, large-scale events such as war will become real to children only when translated into terms of what they mean to characters like Justin, Piri and Friedrich and their parents, homes and friends. After hearing her teacher read The Winter When Time Was Frozen, for example, a fifth-grade student commented, "This book describes the life of these people so well you'd think the Everingens and the other people were a part of your own family" (Note 1). Were it not for stories like these, most historical events of national and international scope and most notable human achievements and tragedies would remain for many American children distant, or even mythical notions with no emotional connections.

A second notable characteristic of children's stories is that their authors take time to describe the effects of large-

scale events on ordinary people. Within the narration of realistic human interaction, concepts can be made understandable and real to young readers. In Step One we referred to prejudice as an important concept to be explored in the study of Naziism and World War II. Excellent passages exploring the nature of this concept can be found in all of the above-mentioned books. Consider, for example, the following passage from Richter's Friedrich. In it, a 13-year-old Jewish boy is trying to retrieve his clothes from a swimming pool attendant in Germany in 1938.

> "Just take a look at this!" the attendant said. "You won't get to see many more of them." Everyone could hear his explanation: "This is one of the Jewish identification cards. The scoundrel lied to me. He claims his name's Friedrich Schneider -- it's Friedrich Israel Schneider, that's what it is -- a Jew that's what he is! A Jew in our swimming pool!" He looked disgusted.
>
> All those still waiting for their clothes stared at Friedrich.
>
> As if he could no longer bear to touch it, the attendant threw Friedrich's identification card and its case across the counter. "Think of it! Jewish things among the clothes of respectable human beings!" he screamed, flinging the coat hanger holding Friedrich's clothes on the ground so they scattered in all directions (pp. 76-77).

When reading passages such as this, students cannot help but be affected by the injustice and humiliation suffered by this character they have come to know as decent, likeable, and intelligent. Furthermore, the concept of prejudice -- its meaning, its effect on people and its often terrible results -- is made startlingly clear. After hearing Friedrich read aloud, a sixth-grade student wrote:

> The book made you feel how you would have felt if you were Jewish or German at that time. I learned how brave the Jewish family was in the book. I also learned how cruel and unthinking people can be and not caring and thinking that these people are the same as we are, human. Another thing is that war is a horrible thing. It can hurt many things. I hope, even though I doubt it, that there will be no more wars and discrimination in this world. The book really touched me (Note 1).

Step Three: Teach Precisely how subject-area teachers develop plans for relating literature to topics in the text will depend on individual style. Generally, teachers should be prepared to use texts and trade books interchangeably throughout any teaching sequence. Nonetheless, we recommend the following instructional combinations that are likely to deepen students' understanding of

content material.

1. The trade book can be very effective if presented to students as a schema and interest builder before reading the text. What better prelude to a unit on ecology than Jean George's (1959) My Side of the Mountain, the story of a boy who runs away from his crowded city life to the Catskill Mountains and learns to live with nature. Young Sam Gribley's adventures and the lessons he learns can set the stage for textbook material and class discussion by establishing an overall picture of how a human can live and thrive in harmony with nature. In addition, his story gives students a store of unusual, dramatic examples of the interdependence of species, food chains and habitats. Imagine, for example, a class that has just read this story and is now studying the chapter "Interdependence of Living Things" in their science text (Science, Addison-Wesley, Level 5, 1980). They read the following passage.

> What did you eat for breakfast today? From what kinds of living things did your food come? In a big breakfast, as shown above, the orange juice came from a green plant. The milk came from a cow. The eggs came from a chicken. The bacon came from a pig. The bread came from wheat.
>
> Every food in this breakfast was part of a living thing. Now it is food for another living thing! Maybe for you!
>
> Do most living things become food for others?

> How about the organisms in a vacant lot, a woods, a pond, the sea? (p. 287)

What a richly detailed schema these students will have for understanding and appreciating man's dependence on nature for food. They will recall Sam's hard-won meals of dogtooth violet bulbs and dandelion greens and freshwater mussels dug from the bed of an icy stream. Doubtless, they will also remember Sam's reliance on Jesse C. James, the raccoon which "...could find mussels where three men could not," (p. 78) and Frightful, the falcon Sam trained to catch small game.

Likewise, O'Dell's (1960) stoic, insightful character, Karana, in Island of the Blue Dolphins makes an eloquent statement for respectful treatment of all living things. The story of this Indian girl's 18-year struggle for survival alone on a small Pacific island provides an interest builder and a dramatic point of reference for students who will soon be reading of habitats, food chains and human impact on the environment.

Knowing which concepts and information will be met later in the textbook, teachers reading stories orally can easily highlight key passages by reading them with particular emphasis or by reading them again after cuing students with, "That was interesting; let's listen to that again." When stories are being read independently or in small groups, teachers can alert students to these passages prior to reading.

One felicitous aspect of using good literature in content classes is that the interest factor is built-in. Good narrative

by its nature drives readers and listeners onward to discover what happens next. But teachers should not depend upon reading alone to build schemata. Since children learn best through active participation with information, teachers should encourage discussion after daily reading sessions. Worthwhile topics could include favorite passages, alternate courses of action for characters, characters' personalities, and possible future developments in the story.

2. Trade books are also effective as elaboration and extension of content and concept acquisition during and after reading the text. During reading students can be formed into groups to discuss particular issues focused on in the text and elaborated upon in related trade books. In small groups children can share what they have found to be particularly informative sections of the trade book or passages that support and extend the text. For instance, the teacher and class could read a section of text then search their trade books for additional and supporting information, as in the following example.

Students studying the Age of Exploration into the New World in their social studies texts also could be reading or listening to O'Dell's (1979) The Captive, which chronicles the adventures of a young Spanish seminarian, Julián Escobar, in the 16th century world of the Maya, Aztec and Inca empires. (The Feathered Serpent and The Amethyst Ring, the remaining books in this trilogy, could be read as well.) These students could be asked to find passages in the trade book describing events from the

Mayan's point of view, a perspective often omitted in textbook treatments. Likewise, students could find passages which help to explain how or why a mere handful of Spaniards were able to overtake three enormous empires. Too often, the driving human forces behind important historical events are not made clear in textbook accounts. But in O'Dell's trilogy the reader is brought face-to-face with the greed and religious zeal which drove many explorers and their followers to fanatical behavior.

Step Four: Follow-up Worthwhile activities following text and trade book reading allow students to take stock of what they have learned, to interpret their new knowledge in some way, and, thereby, to personalize it. In that these activities often help students to assimilate concepts and information and allow teachers to evaluate students' learning and to check for misconceptions, they are to be considered essential to a complete teaching and learning experience.

With writing, drama, and art all viable discourse forms and with the array of electronic and graphic media available in today's schools, follow-up activities can be as diverse as the people who create them. To capitalize on prior reading, however, teachers should direct students toward activities that synthesize text and trade book learning. The following suggestions, which we have illustrated with the same social studies and science topics used throughout this paper, are only representative of the many rewarding activities possible.

Writing activities can be as simple as on-the-scene

descriptions of places or events mentioned briefly in the text and detailed in trade book, or letters to historical figures from students who assume the persona of fictional characters. Both activities allow students to use factual knowledge in a personal way. A more involved writing activity is composing dialogue between historical figures and fictional characters. Dialogue between Piri and Hitler, or Sam and an industrial executive, for example, would most likely elicit responses in which concepts, issues and information are reviewed and reconsidered. As an overall review of a unit, older students could write and illustrate informational picture storybooks for younger students, modelling them after a trade book story and containing facts from both sources. Whole class activities such as newspapers written around a theme (ecology, for example) and fact sheets written around a person such as the Aztec chieftain, Moctezuma, also offer excellent opportunities for synthesizing texts and trade books.

Drama, unrehearsed and without an audience, serves young learners well in providing non-threatening, active contexts for trying out new roles and language forms and experiencing different perspectives. Students can extemporaneously reenact scenes or events mentioned in their reading, or use text material and stories to provide models for original scenes pertaining to the same concepts. Informal, on-the-spot interviews of characters or figures met in texts or trade books allow students to play with newly acquired content area ideas, concepts and facts as they formulate questions and answers. Interviewers, for

example, armed with facts as reported in their texts, could interview Justin in his hide-out, Karana in her island hut, Piri in the Jewish ghetto, or Julián in the Mexican jungle. In addition to creating fictional interviews, students can interview local people who actually lived in Europe during World War II to further personalize and extend their knowledge of that era.

Radio plays are a natural adjunct to reading and writing. In this dramatic form, students select a scene or invent a probable scene from an historical event, write a script with dialogue and action, and tape record it with sound effects for later "broadcast." Freed of the demands of staging and acting, students can concentrate on accurate representation of facts, characters' motives, and appropriate language production. Imagine the language skills, thinking, and relevant concepts and information that would be called into play by students reconstructing the scene surrounding Pizarro's decision to burn his ships off the Mexican coast to prevent his fearful, disgruntled soldiers from deserting!

We recommend activities that require students to plan, think, and, in many cases, write and revise -- time-consuming processes. Much is gained, however, from higher-order follow-up activities, including abundant oral and written language production, opportunities for independent thinking and decision-making, and application of newly-acquired concepts, ideas and information. The benefits of such activities more than

justify the time they require.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the idea of bringing together texts and trade books is not a new one, the discussion of such a combination presented in this paper goes beyond previous attempts by centering on a theoretical rationale and specific recommendations and practical considerations for integrating literature and textbooks. It has been argued that the practice of using trade books in content classrooms can be supported by theories of learning related to capitalizing upon past successes in reading, motivation, and schema-building. These theoretical notions appear to be especially applicable to the stage in reading development in which the young reader is making the transition from narrative to exposition.

On a practical level, the paper provides an in-depth explanation of how trade book and textbook can be used together. Specific instructional recommendations are made for (a) identifying key concepts in the text, (b) choosing trade books to help teach concepts, (c) teaching with the two, and (d) following up.

Additional caveats and promising directions include:

1. There is an urgent need for research to empirically validate our instructional model. While the union of trade book and text can be supported theoretically and appeals to the informed intuition of such scholars as Charlotte Huck (1977; 1982) and Bernice Cullinan (1981), there are virtually no studies available that systematically investigate the relative merits of

this plan to traditional text-only approaches. The authors are presently conducting such a study.

2. Teachers at all grade levels responsible for teaching content area subjects should look for opportunities to integrate trade books with their texts. If the union is feasible and produces positive results in the intermediate and middle grades, there is no reason to doubt that similar benefits cannot be gained from this union in secondary school. Using the trade book in content classrooms should not be perceived as a device or gimmick to try to bring about interest in a topic on Monday only to be forgotten by Friday. In order to utilize effectively the trade book and textbook, teachers need to make long-range plans, carefully considering how each unit's objectives and salient concepts will be developed, and the roles of trade book and text from the introduction to the conclusion of the unit.

3. Teacher-training programs can improve the likelihood of teachers adopting methods that integrate trade book and text by requiring coursework in children's literature and adolescent fiction. To further improve upon this likelihood, all content area methods courses should include a literature component so that students will graduate with skills and knowledge related to using trade books in social studies, history, science, and even mathematics classes. Additionally, teachers in the field who are unfamiliar with children's literature and adolescent fiction should begin an extensive independent reading program.

The content areas deal with interesting, vital information.

Lively

But teachers who rely on textbooks as their sole teaching resource may render this information dry and lifeless. Use of trade books in conjunction with texts helps assure that the vitality and spirit inherent in content area material is kept alive.

Note:

1. Student comments and reactions in this paper are taken from data analyzed in Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, "Batchelder Books: International Read-alouds." Submitted for publication.

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